1826: The first known love letters between two men here in the South come from 22-year-old law student Thomas Withers and future governor **James Hammond**. Wrote the young Jeff: "I feel some inclination to know whether you yet sleep in your shirt-tail, and whether you yet have had the extravagant delight of poking and punching a writhing Bedfellow with your long, fleshen pole — the exquisite touches of which I have often had the honor of feeling."

1944: Seeing the popularity of women's sports teams, other women — straight, bi, and lesbian alike — **The Tomboys**, a basketball team, joins the female fray of sportsters. They eventually branch out into softball to give The Lorelei Ladies a run for their money.

1913: Anthony Auriemma arrives on the scene, the first known female impersonator. Anthony donned women's clothing and paraded around Peachtree Street to protest the ban on men wearing women's garb. He would, in 1924, become a Vaudevillian actor known as **Francois Renault**.

1918: Eight decades after her death, **Dorothy Vogel's** daughter exposes her mother as an Atlantan lesbian in a tell-all, recounting her mother's relationships with women in a series of photographs — photographs that would have damned her mother in the anti-homosexual turn-of-the-century.

1946: We Atlantans like to think that the first LGBTQ-friendly church in the city would be the First Metropolitan Church of Atlanta. For those, Bishop John Kazankts and George Hyde (a seminary school dropout) would like a word. Fed up with being shunned by their own churches, they formed the Eucharist Catholic Church, holding their meetings in the **Winecoff Hotel** (what we now know as The Ellis). There, they lead a congregation of 85 straight and gay parishioners. Not too bad for the 1940s.

1937: The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce distributes a tongue-in-cheek publication, Gay Atlanta. Who paid for the magazine? Ad revenue from the growing clique of local drag performers!

1939: With WWII just underway, lots of ladies were left behind. Left to their own devices, **The Lorelei Ladies**, a softball team, is formed. Word on the mound? Lots of hookups among the players was a good way to show you were a team player.

1953: Using a two-way mirror in the bathroom of the Carnegie Library, the Atlanta Police Department busts 20 men for sodomy, then a felony. Their names, addresses, and places of employment are published in the Atlanta Constitution (the city's morning paper) and the Atlanta Journal (our evening publication). The incident was labeled The Atlanta Public Library Perversion Case, and lead to 19 of the 20 being fired from their jobs. All of the men received no less than two years in prison and are heavily fined for "lewdness."

1953: Guy Dobbs, a female impersonator known as Terry Lynn, manages a club called the Queen of Clubs. Therein, he leads a drag troupe and brings in such performers as Bobbi La Marr and Billy Jones. "We'd run and hide in the furnace room, the beer cooler, in the ladies' restroom," Dobbs is quoted, concerning police bombardment of the joint. "We were scared to death, but never caught!"

1956: With a unanimous vote, Atlanta City Council votes to install more adequate lighting and police presence to deal with gay men using Piedmont Park to cruise for other gay men.

CONTINUES ON PAGE **12**

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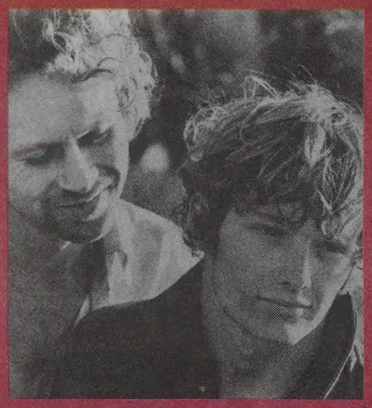
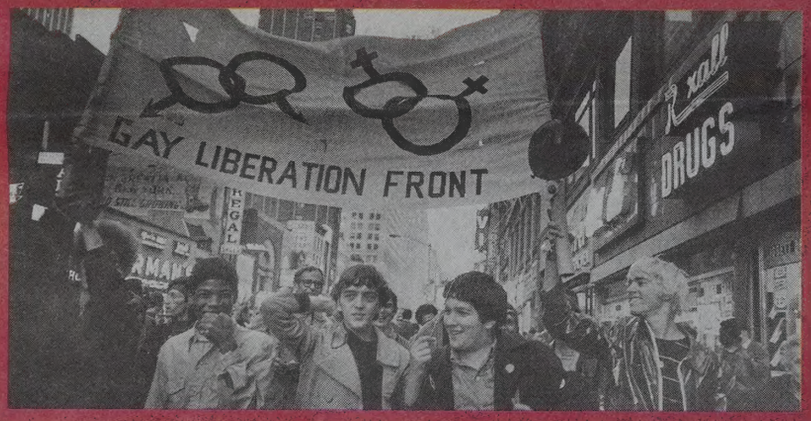
1957: Thomas Elliot wears sunglasses, a skirt, sandals, and a scarf at the Atlanta airport. His next destination? Jail. He was arrested for disorderly conduct for his typically female attire.

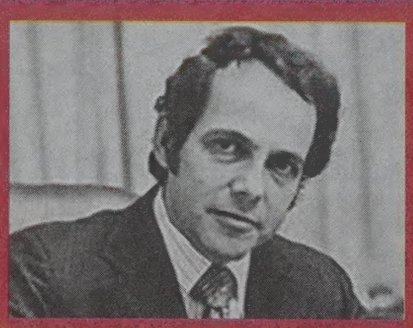
1959: Another arrest for the disorderly conduct of wearing typically female clothing goes to Ralph Ferguson, who had the audacity to wear a green jacket with a bandana, plaid skirt, and shoes that were obviously too small into a theater.



1969: Activist Abby Drue, director of the Ben Marion Institute for Social Justice, is entrapped in the August an APD raid of Andy Warhol's **"Lonesome Cowboys"** at the Ansley Mall Mini Cinema. The raid is the catalyst for the **Georgia Gay Liberation Front** to form here, at a standing-room-only meeting at Emory's New Morning Café in Emory Village. Berl Boykin, Steve Abbott, Bill Smith, and activist Vicki Gabriner are some of the founders of the GGLF. Bill Smith insists the group be called the GEORGIA GLF to encompass the entire state.



1971: Though denied a permit to hold what was to be Atlanta's first Gay Pride March, 125 attendees show up and chant with signs as they march along the city's sidewalks downtown.

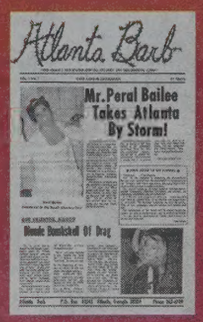


1972: Mayor Sam Massell appoints the first-ever community liaison Charlie St. John, an archivist and journalism working for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

1972: Thanks to the Georgia Gay Liberation Front's tenacity, the first official Gay Pride takes place in Atlanta.

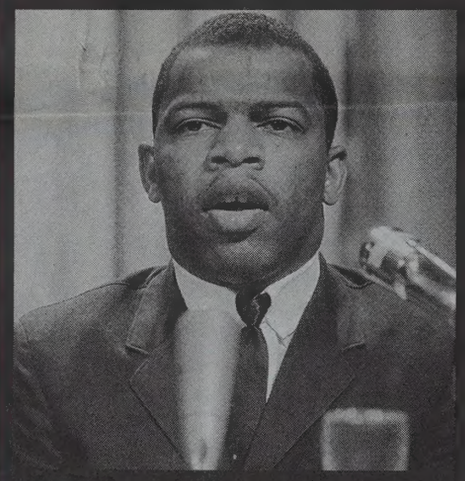
1972: The Atlanta Lesbian Feminist Alliance (ALFA) was founded. An American lesbian feminist organization, among the oldest in the country, it served as a breakaway from the Gay Liberation movement and the Atlanta's Women's Liberation Center.

1973: The Atlanta Journal-Constitution fires Charlie St. John for distributing fliers for the next Gay Pride event. This year, however, lots of attendees wore paper bags over their head in a show of solidarity to those who have been punished for the "crime" of being out and proud.



1974: The Atlanta Barb, the city's first official long-standing gay publication hits the stands. Shortened to simply The Barb, the paper flies in the face of discrimination to draw attention to the plights of (and the small victories in) our local gay community.

1974: Charis Books and More opens in Little Five Points. Not only a community center, it is the second longest-lived, continually operating independent feminist bookstore in the country.



1975: The legendary civil-rights hero and Georgia Congressman **John Lewis** sponsors the first-ever bill for gays and lesbians in our state. To this day, he continues to be an advocate against discriminate for our community and can regularly be seen at LGBTQ events around Georgia.

1975: Gay men aren't manly? 1975's inaugural Mr. Gay Atlanta, a pageant for the beautiful of physique, would beg to differ. The men competing were able to showcase the beefcake in casual, swimwear, and evening attire.

1976: Mayor Maynard Jackson declares a Gay Pride Day for the city to be held on June 26. Not to be upstaged, Citizens For A Decent Atlanta — a Southern Baptist group — ran full-page ads in local publications decrying the mayor's proclamation. FUN FACT: June 26, 2015 is when the Supreme Court of the United States legalized same-sex marriage the law of the land in the landmark case, *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

1976: A monthly magazine geared toward gay nightlife, Cruise Magazine hits stands.

1976: The Atlanta Gay Center is opened.

1978: Anti-gay activist and national celebrity **Anita Bryant** speaks at an anti-LGBTQ crowd as she plays host to the Southern Baptist Convention and its parishioners. The event, drawing a crowd of 4,000, is held at the Georgia World Congress center.

CONTINUES ON PAGE **14**

Where the Girls Were

The Sports Page opened in the 1970s, and still holds reunions for the lesbians who regularly boogied the night away.

THE SPORTS PAGE
GENTLEMEN ALWAYS WELCOME!
MONDAY - 50¢ DRAFT BEER
TUESDAY - JOIN THE "LADIES OF
AND SPECIAL GUESTS EVERY
CHARLIE BROWN AND AMBER
NOW APPEARING EVERY OTHER
WEDNESDAY - ATLANTA'S BIGGEST
BUST AND 75¢ SCHNAPPS
THURSDAY - 75¢ SCHNAPPS
FRIDAY - BEER BUST AND
SUNDAY - CHAMPAGNE

Conswella Bennett

In the late 1970s, there was one Atlanta lesbian bar that left a lasting legacy on its patrons — The Sports Page of Atlanta.

The loud, bumping disco music of the time permeated the bar and lured women to the dance floor to do their 'Sports Page Shuffle' to "We are Family" by Sister Sledge. With a chuckle, Sandy Wilson, a regular at the Sports Page, recalls that ditty as one that got everybody on the dance floor.

"To this day, hearing that song on the radio will bring back a memory," Sandy says. "I remember hitting that dance floor."

She was there the night the club, located at 2069 Cheshire Bridge Road, opened. B.C., a local lesbian who owned it — along with other lesbian clubs in the city — purchased the larger building, an former seafood restaurant.

Sandy was friends with B.C., who also owned another lesbian bar she'd opened earlier in the 1970s — Towers Lounge on Forrest Road. Towers has been described as a small-hole-in-the-wall club space. According to Sandy, though, it was more of a biker bar. That night, Sandy recalls, she looked around the large club with a few people in attendance, and her initial thought was that the space was too big.

She remembers thinking that The Sports Page wouldn't make it. She would be wrong.

"The Sports Page was the crème de la crème," Sandy adds of the club that closed sometime in the 1980s. "I've been all over the United States, and I've never seen a club like it. It was family."

Kathy Deibler, one of the club's former DJs, cocktail waitress, and later manager of The Sports Page, agrees. "I miss the good old days," she tells Georgia Voice. Her fondest memories were being in the DJ booth, sometimes in some crazy costume, watching hundreds of women dancing to disco.

> *"In the 1980s, it wasn't cool to be gay. People were shunned by their families or were still in the closet. My family was The Sports Page."*

"The girls liked to bump and grind," Kathy recalls of the decisions behind her nightly musical selections, with occasional rock hits making the rotation. The ladies came out and danced on one of the biggest dance floors in Atlanta. Kathy describes the floor as Plexiglas, with boxes around the floor highlighted in many-colored lights.

Besides the dancing, Kathy remembers the popular Wednesday night 25¢ Old Milwaukee beer nights that always brought in the crowd. They were almost always out of the beer special by 11pm. Tables were covered in the little 8oz. plastic cups, she says.

Although, Kathy moved out of state for a while, she would return to the club and serve as manager. During that time, she held a number of events to continue attracting the girls, such as mud wrestling and wet T-shirt contests. "We did a lot of things clubs don't do now," she adds. And, of course, there were the drag shows that everyone looked forward to.

Unlike today, both Sandy and Kathy recall fondly that, back then, there were different activities going on both inside and outside the club that brought everyone together.

"It wasn't always about drinking," Sandy says. She adds that they played on softball teams, played sand volleyball on a court put in behind the club, shared holiday dinners together, and did a number of activities outside the club.

"In the 1980s, it wasn't cool to be gay," Sandy says. "People were shunned by their families or were still in the closet. My family was The Sports Page." She reminisces about the Thanksgivings, Easters, and other holidays with her Sports Page family. "We were all we had."

Both Kathy and Sandy feel today's generation doesn't party like they used to do. Both speak of the long-time friendships that were made at The Sports Page. Like the infamous lesbian-connection chart from "The L Word," there were hundreds of friendships made, some becoming relationships. Lasting or not, everyone seemed to remain connected via friendship.

"How many people can say they are friends with over 300 people, [having personally known] them for over 35 years?" Sandy asks. "You don't have that now. I'm very grateful for those years, times, and friendships. The friends I have now are the friends I had in the 1980s."

Those 300+ friends are a part of a closed Facebook group, The Sports Page. There, they reminisce about the good times at The Sports Page, update each other on recent news in their life, and sadly, where they find out about friends gone too soon.

To reunite as a family, Kathy initiated three Sports Page reunions. The first was held in 2010 at a former LGBTQ club in Tucker, the Stage Door. In 2011 and 2016, the reunions were held at their old stomping grounds, which is now Heretic Atlanta.

Sandy recalls of attending the 2011 reunion at the Heretic, "When I walked up to that door, the Heretic guys were standing at the door, and they said, 'Welcome Home.'" Moved by the gesture, Sandy adds, "I was home."

Plans are being made to hold a final reunion in October 2019 during Atlanta Pride. Kathy said the plan is to return home to the Heretic for the final event.

Where We Intersect

I'M A BLACK, STRAIGHT WOMAN WHO'S AN ALLY TO THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY AND I IDENTIFY WITH ITS STRUGGLES

Elizabeth Hazzard

The LGBTQ community has been shaken by extreme discrimination, beaten by unjust legislation, and riddled with the bullets of society's cruel persecution, yet the community and its members stand taller and stronger than ever. Their pride solidifies them, allowing them to withstand the hatred they receive for simply being themselves. Whereas the average person would cave under such pressure, they choose to defy the world and take back their right to define themselves rather than letting outsiders define them. What is there not to admire about such revolutionary pillars of strength and force?

There is no singular experience that made me an ally of the community — I simply see no reason NOT to be an ally of the community. As an African-American woman who's had to fight the double battle of racism and sexism, I've never seen a reason not to tie the LGBTQ struggle with both the race struggle and the gender equality struggle. In my eyes, discrimination should either be condemned on all fronts or it shouldn't be condemned at all — there's no in between. If I can't stand for LGBTQ equality then I can't stand for women receiving equal pay, and if I can't stand for that then I can't stand for police targeting the black community. It's not equality if *everyone* isn't worthy of it.

I've witnessed the agony that typically follows a coming-out story: isolation from family, segregation at school, and overall alienation from the whole of society. LGBTQ people are treated as outsiders, foreigners at every turn, and yet they persist, enduring separation from the people who are supposed to be closest to them and they adhere tightly to their values, for bending, breaking, and wavering are the things that this tough life teaches them never to do. As I watch them rage war against prejudiced viewpoints and challenge a government that attempts to steal their unalienable rights, I see them as boundary pushers, as justice warriors, as constraint breakers — and I salute them.

The most common weapon formed against them is the Bible. People preach that being with the same sex is a sin. To these sanctimonious people, I would encourage taking note of the millions of deaths within the LGBTQ community, a result of pure hatred and targeted violence — useless carnage must be a much more harmful sin than same-gender love. As stated best by Young M.A, a lesbian rapper who owns her sexuality with raw confidence, in her song "Kween:"

They talk about me like they past perfect
Like they present pretty, like they future flawless
Like this world ain't got drug addicts and alcoholics
Rapists, robbers, dealers, murder, extortion
Like me being gay is so fucking important

I'm an ally of the community because I'm an ally of equality, of love, of life. We live on a planet that is literally tilted, so imagine if we somehow forced it straight: The whole of our existence would be disrupted. If we can accept an entire planet that isn't straight, then surely we can accept people who aren't either.

Once Upon A Time, There Was OutWrite Books

Craig Washington

There are a few remaining brick-and-mortar sites that hold memory in a senile city that rushes to pave its early queer paradise. Where 10th & Piedmont now sits, there was a once bookstore named Outwrite. "Atlanta's gay and lesbian bookstore and coffeehouse" was founded by visionary Philip Rafshoon and opened on November 5, 1993 in Midtown Promenade. By 1996 — the same year Atlanta hosted the Olympics — the shop relocated to one of Midtown's most popular intersections. Within a 1-mile radius of the new location, a string of gay establishments including the Armory, Loretta's, and Backstreet were thriving. The venues that helped establish Midtown as a gay enclave would all be swept under the gay-sanitizing tide of regentrification, later followed by the Outwrite's own demise. As in all white-dominated "gayborhoods," people of color encountered racism of varied forms in Midtown — including lack of representation.

Some of my younger brothers reported being racially targeted by Outwrite staff for sitting in the lounge without making a purchase. Despite such tensions, Outwrite maintained a diverse base and many black patrons felt welcome there.

What made Outwrite indispensable was its unique functions. It began serving unmet needs at a time by which its community was ready to be so served. With the dawn of the nineties came a flourishing of LGBTQ writers, activists, and visibility. Outwrite offered a place to find work by queer artists, enjoy performances, hold town-hall forums, and connect over coffee and bagels. Like its older sister shop Charis Books and More, Outwrite was a makeshift community center. Author events featured figures like James Earl Hardy, E. Lynn Harris, RuPaul, and Franklin Abbott, who otherwise may not have been as accessible to Southern audiences. This was particularly significant for black LGBTQ fans whose artists had less exposure. People from all parts Georgia and out-of-staters gathered to bask in such a welcoming space. Adodi Muse, the self-titled gay Negro ensemble performed there as did their writers' collective. Among the signatures on the store's signing wall, my favorite was Essex Hemphill's humble autograph: "Thank you for inviting me to your shop."

In 2012, the venerated outlet closed its doors. I have not yet fully gotten over it. I miss sipping coffee with Paris Eley or the aptly named John Speaks on the tiny corner porch. I felt guilty for not doing more to raise the alarm when I thought there was still time. I resented our community for letting Outwrite wither, opting for convenience and Amazon.com discounts. In time, I came to understand that Outwrite endured long enough to live out its purpose. Its impact is manifest through today's LGBTQ cultural outlets and meeting centers. With its rainbow flag perched in plain view above that unmistakable sign, Outwrite was a bright beacon of self acceptance and community investment like few before it. For years, Outwrite served as the concluding landmark for the Pride Parade. Onlookers would crowd its festooned front to witness marchers take that final right turn onto 10th St. There was no place more fitting to cheer us on and welcome us home!